‘Few Engines can be more powerful, and at the same time more salutary in their tendency, than literature’, observed the philosopher William Godwin in 1793; and his Tory opponent, T.J. Mathias, agreed with him on this point, arguing in 1797 that ‘LITERATURE, well or ill conducted, IS THE GREAT ENGINE by which, I am fully persuaded, ALL CIVILIZED STATES must ultimately be supported or overthrown.’ In the period 1776-1832 literature was seen as the site for these new imagined world orders; it was the realm in which imagination, politics, and philosophy could converge.

This module aims to introduce you to some key voices and themes from the Romantic period. It is team-taught by scholars who specialise in the period: through our seminars we will explore some of the literary conversations, debates, hopes and disappointments which were produced by this age of revolution and innovation. Key critical reading is recommended each week to help you gain a sense of current critical thinking on core writers and themes. Students will be encouraged to read closely and think reflectively, developing their own critique of individual texts and gaining an awareness of the politics of language and genre. The module will provide an essential methodological background to the MA in Literature of the Romantic Period, enabling students to interrogate terms such as ‘Romantic’, but also offer an intellectually exciting and diverse encounter with a range of writers across many genres.

Week 1: various introductory meetings and events for all postgraduates
Week 2: Nature, Liberty, Slavery (Mary Fairclough)
Week 3: Politics in the 1790s (Emma Major)
Week 4: Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility (Chloe Wigston Smith)
Week 5: Wordsworth’s Wanderers (Jim Watt)
Week 6: Reading week (no seminar)
Week 7: Romantic London (Jim Watt)
Week 8: John Keats (Jon Mee)
Week 9: Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley (Emma Major)
Week 10: Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus (Mary Fairclough)